

The most aid-dependent countries that received U.S. foreign assistance were likelier to support AFRICOM, and countries enjoying high levels of growth with low levels of foreign aid tended to criticize it.

The Political Economy of African Responses to the U.S. Africa Command

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In February 2007, when the United States unveiled a consolidated military command for Africa, commonly called AFRICOM, it unexpectedly encountered negative reactions. The Department of Defense (DOD) attributed these responses to a public-relations failure. Numerous scholars now question this explanation, and contradictory statements continued even after DOD acknowledged its blunders. I test an alternative explanation for African reactions using a content analysis of more than five hundred African news reports. The results show that support for AFRICOM corresponded with greater aid dependence, and that countries sustaining high levels of growth with less foreign aid were more critical of AFRICOM. The critics included key American allies. The findings suggest that good economic performance increases the latitude African countries have when responding to U.S. policy leverage.

In February 2007, U.S. President George W. Bush announced the creation of a new military command for Africa. Rather than dividing responsibility for Africa among three distinct military commands, the U.S. Africa Command, popularly called AFRICOM, created one unified “area of responsibility” for the continent. Africans greeted the initiative with skepticism. A magazine commentary in South Africa urged Africans to oppose AFRICOM because it threatened to “destabilize an already fragile continent.” That same month, Kenya’s *Nation* and Zambia’s *Post* published editorials condemning AFRICOM as a brazen effort to counter Chinese influence (Daly 2007). Nigerian newspapers urged the government to “Stop AFRICOM” and praised patriotic politicians for their “censure” of U.S. foreign policy (*Leadership* 2007; *Vanguard* 2008).

What explains these responses, which caught Pentagon officials off guard? I examine the Bush administration’s claim that African criticism stems from inadequate consultation and a failed public-relations campaign. The DOD and various scholars acknowledge missteps in AFRICOM’s rollout.

Existing studies focus on domestic and bureaucratic reactions and evaluate African responses largely through anecdotal evidence. Contradictions in official statements continued even after the DOD attempted to compensate for its communications blunders. I advance an alternative explanation, linking the level of support for AFRICOM to the combination of two factors: a country's level of foreign aid generally and aid from the United States specifically. Countries experiencing growth without much aid were likelier to criticize AFRICOM, even if they were traditional U.S. allies. I attribute these patterns to an inverse relationship between economic dependence and the latitude countries have in responding to U.S. policy leverage. These findings stand out in the context of new research questioning the efficacy and role of foreign aid. President Barack Obama's administration remains committed to AFRICOM, a controversial policy in an area of the world where the U.S. otherwise enjoys great popularity.

This essay proceeds as follows. First, I outline the Pentagon's reasons for creating AFRICOM, situating this within a debate over whether this decision constitutes change or continuity in U.S. relations with Africa. Second, I analyze the Bush administration's explanation of African reactions. This perspective underestimated opposition from within the U.S. bureaucracy: it cast critics as misinformed about American intentions. Third, I measure reactions to AFRICOM with a content analysis of 506 news reports from African sources in twenty-eight countries during the eighteen months following AFRICOM's public announcement. I then test a political economy explanation and find that countries with high levels of economic growth and low levels of aid were likelier to criticize AFRICOM. The conclusion calls for research on how foreign pressures or enticements to adopt unpopular security policies could adversely impact democratic consolidation.

American Interests in Africa

This section explains the basic rationale for AFRICOM and why its announcement attracted unexpected attention. Although AFRICOM continues a number of existing U.S. policies and it otherwise implements an overdue bureaucratic reorganization, its new missions reflect increased U.S. strategic and economic interests in Africa. These missions and the strategy for implementing them antagonized various government organizations and domestic interests, whose criticisms converged with African concerns about AFRICOM's geopolitical impact.

Rationale

Formally in operation since October 2008, the DOD's sixth regional command consolidated operations previously shared by Central Command (CENTCOM), which had had responsibilities for Egypt, the Middle East, and the Horn of Africa; Pacific Command, which had overseen operations in

the Indian Ocean; and the European Command, which had monitored most of Europe. This consolidation increases Africa's profile to policymakers, requires a dedicated annual briefing to Congress from a four-star general, and aims to remedy a shortage of area experts at the DOD. The idea for AFRICOM had begun circulating by the year 2000; however, it became more urgent as the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan stretched resources. Creating one area of responsibility for Africa (leaving out Egypt) resolves a practical problem, since military analysts had to coordinate different commands to consider conflict spillover (Ploch 2009). This both complicated information sharing and impeded the creation of a broad strategic vision for Africa.

AFRICOM is a long overdue reorganization of the DOD and appears to be a logical outgrowth of ongoing American involvement in Africa. The regional command structure grew out of cold-war preparation for conflict with the Soviet Union by integrating American forces, planning military scenarios, and coordinating with local allies. Africa lacked a unified command because it was not seen as a strategic priority (Lawson 2007; McFate 2008a). Even so, America's military engagement with Africa during the cold war included the airlift of Congolese troops fighting regional rebels in 1964 and 1967 (Devlin 2007), intelligence operations to undermine and possibly eliminate nationalists (Weissman 2010), and attacks on Libya during the 1980s. The U.S. intervened through proxy wars, including military logistical support for Chad's government in the 1980s and covert operations to overthrow Angola's government in the 1970s (Blum 2003; Stockwell 1978).

The end of the cold war ushered in new varieties of engagement, including election-monitoring assistance and expanding trade ties, which led to the passage of the African Growth and Opportunity Act in 2000. Meanwhile CENTCOM's role during the 1991 Gulf War suggested that the regional military command structure would continue to have usefulness (Burgess 2009). Military engagement in Africa included President Bill Clinton's humanitarian intervention in Somalia in 1993. To ease future peace-keeping operations and increase cooperation, his administration launched the African Crisis Response Force (ACRF), soon renamed the African Crisis Response Initiative (ACRI) when the word *force* attracted criticism. The administration became more focused on counterterrorism when al Qaeda bombed U.S. embassies in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, prompting cruise-missile attacks on Sudan two weeks later.

President George W. Bush replaced ACRI with the Africa Contingency Operations Training and Assistance Program, and increased attention to terrorism following the attacks of 11 September 2001. His administration initiated joint military-training programs in Africa, including Operation Flintlock and Operation Enduring Freedom Trans-Sahara. Most significantly, the administration created Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa (CJTTF-HOA) in response to growing concern about the spread of militant Islam, particularly from Somalia (Bile 2007; Volman 2007). With two thousand soldiers and contractors, CJTTF-HOA in Djibouti is the largest U.S. military base on the continent. It is likely a model for an eventual AFRICOM headquarters

on the continent because African military officers from throughout the region are embedded in its staff, and it broadly engages with African regional institutions in its pursuit of the so-called “3 D’s” of American foreign policy: defense, diplomacy, and development (Pham 2008; van de Walle 2010).

Significant political and economic changes accompanied the military escalation from 2001 to 2008. According to the U.S. Trade Representative’s Office, U.S. exports to Africa doubled, and the total value of all trade with Africa (including imports) tripled. According to budget documents for the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), aid to Africa quadrupled, from \$1.1 billion to \$4.4 billion. The President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) added to these levels. Commitments through the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) included over \$1.4 billion dollars in 2007 alone. The foreign-aid budget request for fiscal year 2008 contained a 54 percent increase for aid to Africa, and President Barack Obama recently proposed doubling that.

More Change than Continuity

This expansion of military and nonmilitary ties over the last few decades suggests that AFRICOM expresses a measure of continuity, or perhaps a sensible governmental response to an evolving relationship; however, the bureaucratic reorganization came bundled with unconventional missions for DOD, the creation of new instruments of American soft power, and an articulation of U.S. objectives that alarmed African governments.

AFRICOM is taking over the coordination of CJTF-HOA, trans-Saharan counterterrorism operations, joint military training exercises, and much conflict-prevention and peacekeeper-training work, yet several of its features make clear that it is more than just a bureaucratic reorganization. Additional “phase zero” operations anticipate enhancing security capacity to prevent conflicts from emerging in the first place and shaping attitudes toward America in advance, in case combat takes place in the future (McFate 2008b; Priest 2004). An American aid worker in the Congo gave this author the example of DOD dropping leaflets over the city of Goma in 2009. A retired senior State Department official singled out the website *magharebia.com* as one of AFRICOM’s propaganda operations working at odds with diplomatic initiatives in northern Africa.

DOD has emphasized AFRICOM’s “nonkinetic” missions as a great innovation. These missions are not entirely new, as Southern Command was already building roads and digging wells in Latin America in the 1980s. It has now embraced noncombat missions, such as medical support after hurricanes in the Caribbean, multinational humanitarian training operations, and efforts to “counter anti-U.S. messaging” in the “marketplace of ideas” (U.S. Southern Command 2009). Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy Ryan Henry told Congress that AFRICOM would take such activities to the next level by breaking down bureaucratic lines between military and humanitarian operations (U.S. House of Representatives 2007b). To this end,

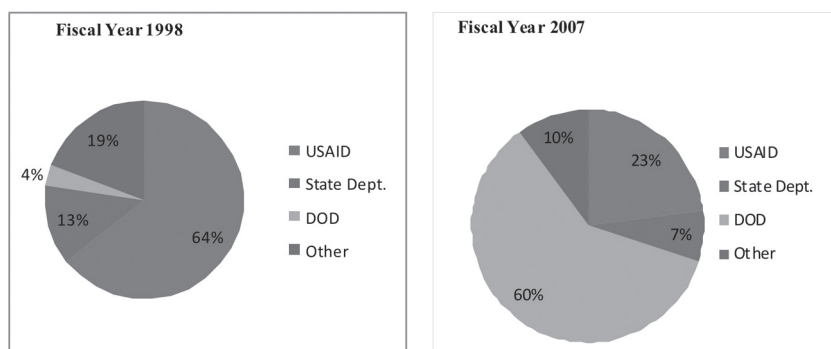


Figure 1. Total Global Aid Disbursements by Agency, FY 1998 and FY 2007 Compared. Data were compiled by David Haun from the following sources: Lawson and Epstein (2009); Lawson and Tarnoff (2009); Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (2006); USAID Official Development Assistance Database (retrieved 19 May 2009 from <http://usoda.eads.usaidallnet.gov>).

President Bush's Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld, sought to merge the Pentagon's hard power with the soft power of diplomacy and foreign aid, thus abandoning Bill Clinton's Presidential Decision Directives, which generally limited the military to combat missions. AFRICOM attempts to coordinate development and diplomacy through an interagency mechanism that is supposed to operate with a sizeable civilian presence, although by the last count, embedded civilians constituted only 1 percent of the staff (General Accountability Office 2009). The budget for AFRICOM itself is modest, and it publicly backed off from development missions in response to criticism from implementers, yet DOD's overall share of foreign aid has dramatically increased. Figure 1 illustrates how it displaced the USAID's total share of aid disbursement in the decade leading up to the creation of AFRICOM.

A weakening of traditional organs of diplomacy and development corresponded with this dramatic growth of aid. The State Department suffered declining funding and influence during the 1990s, impeding recruitment and credibility (Dunn 2009; van de Walle 2010). Senate Republicans noted a "significant" growth of military staff and programs in noncombat countries and worried that embassies were being refashioned as "command posts in the war on terror" that challenged ambassadorial authority (Senate Foreign Relations Committee 2006). USAID suffered a blow as MCC overshadowed its resources and then left it with the "high-maintenance" countries, where economic development assistance is desperately needed but likelier to fail. More than just an antipoverty program, the MCC sprang from post-9/11 counterterrorism thinking that economic development undermines the conditions for extremism (Owusu 2007). Similarly, while PEPFAR does indeed reduce HIV infections, critics argue that it does so by overshadowing traditional health and development infrastructure with American security

interests (Copson 2007; Pereira 2009). As intended, it has promoted friendly attitudes toward the United States. President John Kufuor of Ghana lauded Bush for doing more for Africa “than any previous American Presidency” (*Public Agenda* 2008), and an editorial in Rwanda greeted Bush’s arrival with praise for PEPFAR (*New Times* 2008b). PEPFAR and MCC programs effectively shift the instruments of soft power away from the traditional foreign policy agencies.

Asserting New American Interests in Africa

While DOD’s new roles remain contentious, there is more general agreement about America’s expanding interests in Africa. At least four emerging emphases drove the creation of AFRICOM, each one carrying caveats or cautionary notes. Foremost among them is terrorism, with the Pentagon especially focused on countries with ineffective governance, such as Mali and Somalia. Though the empirical evidence remains in doubt, counterterrorism policy presumes that poverty makes it easy for radicals to capitalize on alienation, and the inability of states to control their borders means that they might offer sanctuary for terrorists (Mills 2007; Sieber 2007; U.S. House of Representatives 2007b). The attempted airline bombing on Christmas Day 2009 appears to demonstrate a more direct threat: that Africans might actually attack the United States. But terrorism is typically not organized in Africa, and non-Islamic terrorists, such as the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda, better characterize the situation (Piombo 2007).

A second area of policy interest centers on violence precipitated by nontraditional causes, such as migration, urbanization, or refugee flows that stimulate tensions. DOD is studying environmental disasters and global warming as potential causes of civil conflict in Africa, and it has been running war games to see how the military might respond (*New York Times* 2009; Sheikh 2008). These missions may have problems too. When AFRICOM held a seminar in Cape Verde on the preservation of the environment in areas affected by military training, Congressman Bob Filner (D-CA), who closely follows the military’s compliance with environmental laws, called this ironic: “The United States military has a terrible record when it comes to protecting and preserving the environment” (Filner 2008).

Third, DOD plans to counterbalance China’s growing influence in the region. China, in its efforts to expand its markets and secure natural resources for a rapidly growing economy, has invested in African countries with little regard for political rights (Klare and Volman 2006; McFate 2008b). This view tends to understate the longtime horizon guiding China’s foreign policy (Brautigam 2010).

Finally, securing access to oil and other natural resources is a high priority (Lubeck, Watts, and Lipschutz 2007; Penn 2008). The Energy Policy Commission led by Vice President Dick Cheney in 2001 recommended increasing oil imports from West Africa as an insurance policy against overdependence on Mideast oil. President Bush repeated the goal in his 2006

State of the Union Address, announcing plans “to replace more than 75% of [U.S.] oil imports from the Middle East by 2025.” Shortly before AFRICOM’s announcement, the U.S. Navy increased its presence in the Gulf of Guinea, explaining, “Our goal is to ensure a more stable maritime environment to ensure their ability to get those resources to market” (*American Forces Press Service* 2006). Shortly after AFRICOM’s unveiling, Vice Admiral Robert Moeller described “the free flow of natural resources from Africa to the global market” as one of AFRICOM’s “guiding principles,” citing terrorism, oil disruption, and China as major “challenges” to U.S. interests.¹

Recent oil discoveries in Ghana, Sierra Leone, and Tanzania increase the likelihood of a large share of oil imports from African countries, plus the possibility of new sectarian threats to Western companies operating there. Economic losses to Western oil companies from violence in Nigeria’s Niger Delta could run as high as \$10 billion between 2005 and 2014 (Gilpin 2007). In fact, according to my tracking of news reports, militant groups in the region took more than three hundred hostages between January 2006 and July 2007. Heavy-handed responses from the Nigerian government’s Joint Task Force have antagonized militants, while negotiated political solutions including the ongoing amnesty process, which brought 20,000 militants out of the swamps, have offered the most promise.

Reacting to AFRICOM’s Announcement

After this series of policy declarations pointing to American interest in oil, counterterrorism, and geopolitical balancing, Africans greeted AFRICOM skeptically. Editorials and commentaries in Kenya, South Africa, Botswana and elsewhere criticized the proposed change. Some argued that an expanded American presence would increase the security risks to Africans, presenting what Berschinski describes (2007) as a security dilemma for DOD. A Kenyan newspaper wrote “AFRICOM represents a potential threat to the very countries the U.S. claims it is intended to benefit” (*New African* 2007). A newspaper in Namibia reasoned that an increased American presence would make the country a target for terrorists (*New Era* 2007). An opinion piece in a South African paper pointed a finger at the American president, commenting “Bush is a walking danger anywhere he goes. His Al Qaeda enemies always follow him” (*Business Day* 2008). Nigeria’s House of Representatives officially expressed its concerns, prompting a briefing from U.S. embassy officials (*The Guardian* 2008).

Regional organizations also spoke out against AFRICOM. The South African Minister of Defense stated his government’s opposition to it in August 2007, characterizing it as the “continental position” of the African Union. The South African Development Community, composed of fourteen nations, stated that “sister countries of the region should not agree to host AFRICOM and in particular, armed forces, since this would have a negative effect.” The Economic Community of West African States issued a similar

proclamation (Africa Action 2008). A series of news articles commended South Africa's leadership for criticizing AFRICOM (*Business Day* 2007; *BuaNews* 2007). An independent newspaper in Sudan expressed similar sentiment (*al-Adath* 2007).

AFRICOM met skepticism and occasional hostility from affected U.S. government agencies too—meaning that inadequate interagency consultation contributed to the public-relations failure (Forest and Crispin 2009). This in turn complicated AFRICOM's recruitment of government civilians. Some State Department officials saw AFRICOM as encroaching on diplomacy. Even if the U.S. sought a whole-government approach to Africa, integrating a range of different functions under one unified bureaucracy and policy vision, AFRICOM offered a "cure worse than the disease," wrote a retired ambassador (Marks 2009). Another predicted that DOD's staff dedicated to Africa would soon exceed the size of the entire Africa Bureau in the State Department (Lyman 2009). One intelligence analyst asked "why is the military leading an organization whose stated mission is, by definition, largely the responsibility of State?" (Penn 2008). Senior bureaucrats at the U.S. Agency for International Development and its implementing partners vocalized concerns about putting a military face on development (Taylor 2009). To smooth things over on its end, AFRICOM appeared to back away from its interagency component and downplayed its developmental ambitions (Lubold 2008; Mboup, Mihalka, and Lathrop 2009). It met with Congressional leaders after Representative Donald Payne (D-NJ), chair of the House subcommittee responsible for oversight of Africa policy, complained that there had been "no consultation" with his committee (U.S. House of Representatives 2007a).

A Public-Relations Blunder?

The Bush administration attributed the negative responses to a failed public-relations campaign and inadequate consultation with potential African partners. Secretary of Defense Robert Gates commented, "I think in some respects we probably didn't do as good a job as we should have when we rolled out AFRICOM," and another official complained "suddenly you have wide publics that have no idea what we're talking about" (DeYoung 2008). McFate mentions that AFRICOM simply did not articulate its message well, "despite DOD's exceptional campaign of consultation on the continent" (McFate 2008a). Several scholars claim that a better communications strategy could improve AFRICOM's image (Forest and Crispin 2009; Pham 2009); after all, the ACRF had overcome similar public relations problems in the 1990s (Berman 2009).

Even after errors in the rollout had been acknowledged, public-relations problems persisted. Two senior Congressional aides told me that AFRICOM had declined their briefing requests until December 2008. DOD reasoned that they answered to the House Armed Services Committee, but not to other committees. This occurred shortly after the Foreign Affairs

Committee wrote to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates about AFRICOM's adverse impact on agencies responsible for development assistance.² Burgess argues that such lack of consultation was deliberate, reflecting Secretary Rumsfeld's authoritarian style. Among African partners, the DOD assumed it did not need to seek explicit approval since it already had ongoing security relationships with the United States (Burgess 2009). After all, the United States was committed to \$500 million dollars for counterinsurgency training and equipment through the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Partnership. Moreover, the United States has a large presence on the continent through CJTF-HOA, and one of DOD's largest military bases in the world exists in Seychelles, where local relations have been strained (Vine 2009). In contrast to the public-relations explanation for negative reactions, several scholars argue that DOD mischaracterized African concerns by not more openly admitting its goal of defending American interests (Lamb 2009; Mboup, Mihalka, and Lathrop 2009; N'Diaye and Africa 2009). With this in mind, a leading expert on Somalia concluded that the problem with AFRICOM is the mission, not just the message (Menkhaus 2009).

An Alternative Explanation for African Relations

Criticism of AFRICOM thus persisted even after DOD had acknowledged its public relations blunders. This section tests an alternative explanation for African responses, identifying a pattern where AFRICOM met either critics or supporters. First, I outline the rationale for a political-economy hypothesis, premised on the idea that the levels of foreign aid and economic growth shaped African reactions to AFRICOM. Second, I describe a methodology for a content analysis of an original dataset of 506 distinct news reports from Africa. Finally, my analysis shows that the most aid-dependent countries that received U.S. foreign assistance were likelier to support AFRICOM, and countries enjoying high levels of growth with low levels of foreign aid tended to criticize it.

The Political Economy of African Responses

Though most official and unofficial responses to AFRICOM were critical, it did have notable pockets of support on the continent. Ethiopia's Prime Minister Meles Zenawi said it would bring peace and stability to Africa (*Ethiopian News Agency* 2007). Liberia's President, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, lobbied to host the headquarters before her meeting with President Bush (*The News* 2007). In Rwanda, the *New Times* published several pieces praising Bush for his visit there and for generous MCC assistance (*New Times* 2008a). According to published USAID data and World Development Indicators (World Bank 2009), all these countries share a significant reliance on foreign aid and close ties to the U.S. For example, since 2003 Rwanda received over \$90 million in aid from the United States, with a quarter of its gross national income (GNI)

coming from aid; Liberia received nearly 50 percent of its GNI in foreign aid, and the United States sent Ethiopia half a billion dollars in economic aid.

Could this anecdotal evidence mean that high levels of foreign aid from the U.S. account for positive responses to the Pentagon's plans? Several ideas support this intuition. Lamb argues that countries that supported AFRICOM did so with the anticipation that they would receive more aid (Lamb 2009). The United States already has a more positive standing in Africa than anywhere else in the world, and Pew Global Attitude surveys link this popularity to its increase in foreign assistance since 2000.³ AFRICOM enjoys a high profile, and according to its public-affairs office, its top general, William Ward, has visited nearly thirty African countries since October 2007. This signals to aid recipient countries that AFRICOM is a top foreign-policy priority. Much new research on foreign aid argues that it can make governments accountable to donors and their interests, often at the expense of their domestic constituencies (Englebert 2006; Gibson et al. 2005; Joseph and Gillies 2009). In this sense, it is reasonable to expect beneficiaries to be responsive to their patrons and donors.

If positive reactions to AFRICOM are rooted in ties that encourage economic reliance on external support, then one would expect the converse for countries experiencing economic growth without significant levels of foreign aid. AFRICOM's announcement actually coincided with significant signs of growth on the continent. In 2008 the World Bank's Africa Development Indicators revealed a major improvement in performance: whereas the average gross domestic product (GDP) stagnated at -0.7 percent in the 1990s, from 2000 to 2006 its growth per capita was 2.0 percent. The probability that any given country would experience growth acceleration—including those without natural resources—more than doubled.⁴ While much research explores the causes of this economic growth and debates its sustainability,⁵ few scholars have considered the political impact it might have. Therefore, apart from the particular question of African responses to AFRICOM, the political-economy hypothesis explores new dimensions of the changing nature of U.S.-Africa relations.

Variables Measuring Aid Dependence and Reactions to AFRICOM

I measure the level of support for AFRICOM with an original dataset of news accounts reporting African responses to it during the first eighteen months after Bush's initial announcement in February 2007. This time period gives African countries ample time to respond publicly and it generates a large number of possible reports. To reduce the problem that country attitudes might shift over time, the time period ends before the U.S. decision not to base AFRICOM on the continent; that decision is the equivalent of a second policy announcement, largely in response to the initial African reactions under study here. This sampling approach thus enables an analysis of a broad cross-section of opinion, treating the eighteen-month period essentially as a single unit of time. Constructing the dataset involved a broad search

covering more than two hundred media outlets, narrowing down the relevant articles, and then coding them all to gauge the level of support.

First, I carried out keyword searches of two major databases for references to “AFRICOM” or “Africa Command.” AllAfrica.com compiles news articles from forty-eight countries. A potential problem with this database is supposedly an Anglophone bias. According to AllAfrica.com, fewer Franco-phone media outlets are on the Internet, and Nigeria (an Anglophone country) has a huge number of publications. Nevertheless, my search covered thirty-two sources in French from ten countries, fifty sources in English from twenty-seven countries, and numerous bilingual sources in Arabic, Somali, and other languages. This diversity aims to avoid overrepresenting English-language media—a potential source of bias in the sample. To increase the sample size, I searched the World News Catalogue (WNC), which compiles news reports from more than 120 sources in fifty-one African countries. A potential shortcoming of the WNC is that it is unclear how it decides which articles to cover; unlike AllAfrica.com, the database is not comprehensive, covering all the reports from all the monitored sources. Also, since the U.S. Department of Commerce prepares the translations, the search could arguably produce a pro-U.S. government bias. As a supplemental source, however, this offers an advantage, since the department closely follows reactions to U.S. policy, regardless of whether the references are supportive.⁶ The WNC scans transcripts in French, English, Portuguese, and Arabic. This is important because with high illiteracy rates in many African countries, radio and TV remain important sources of news and opinion. Including the WNC therefore limits another potential source of bias. These steps produced a total of 506 print and radio news reports from twenty-eight countries. Like other content analyses, this methodology cannot claim comprehensive coverage of the entire universe of possible news reports, yet the selection process ultimately examines more than two hundred media outlets, uses an objective keyword search to identify references, and attempts to control for two possible sources of bias. These steps increase confidence in the representativeness of the sample.

Second, I eliminated articles that duplicate quotations from elsewhere or that only list information—for example, by simply mentioning the creation of AFRICOM or announcing a press conference without providing any commentary. I removed reports from sources published outside of Africa, as well as forty-six statements from American officials. This reduced the total sample to 233 news reports. Since each article contains multiple quotations, this includes 284 distinct cases. I then dropped nine countries with only one or two news reports in the sample,⁷ producing an average of sixteen distinct news articles per country.

Third, I coded every reference to AFRICOM using Nvivo content-analysis software. The distribution of these comments is displayed in figure 2. “Supportive” responses entailed positive comments that did not state qualifying remarks or potential reservations. Another set of comments displayed concern about American intentions but then noted that AFRICOM

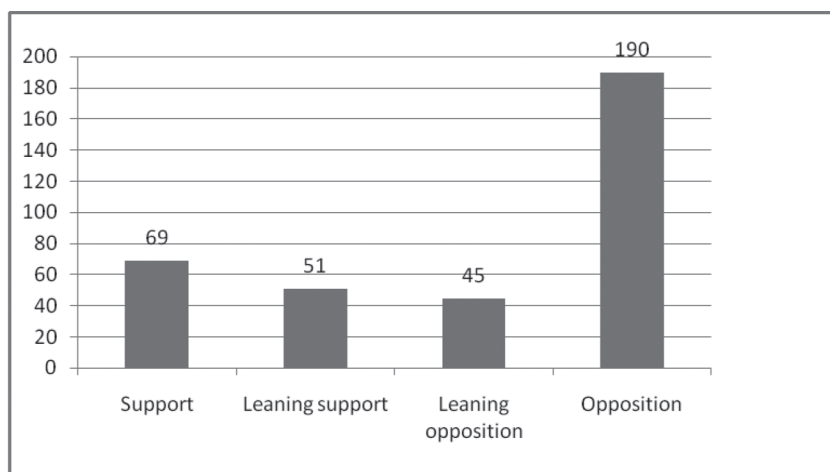


Figure 2. Distribution of Coded Responses, by Number of Distinct Cases.

could bring benefits, or they stated that patience would be prudent. These responses have been coded as “leaning support.” References critical of AFRICOM have been coded as “oppose” unless they openly weighed any potential benefits or mitigated outright criticism. To produce an average level of support for each country, I assigned a value of 1 through 4 for each response, starting with “support” scored as 1.

To gauge the susceptibility of African countries to American leverage, I borrow from a now classic study of the impact of international factors on domestic policy in the developing world: Levitsky and Way (2006) operationalize vulnerability as a function of aid dependence relative to a country’s “economic and/or military power.” To this end, I group African countries according to their overall level of foreign aid from all countries using data from the world development indicators. Nine low-dependence countries meet two criteria: they receive less than 10 percent of their GNI in foreign aid, and they sustain an average annual growth rate of at least 3 percent since 2004. Six swing states in the next group receive between 10 and 15 percent of GNI in foreign. Finally, four countries labeled “high dependence” meet two strict criteria: they receive at least 15 percent of their GNI in foreign aid, and at the time they were receiving or in the process of applying for aid from the U.S. government’s Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC).⁸ The countries in each category are displayed in table 1, which reports the total economic and military assistance from the United States and the status of each country’s eligibility for funds, using the MCC’s categories.

Unlike traditional military or economic aid, MCC eligibility is objectively determined and not conditioned upon U.S.-specific criteria. This makes it an especially good test of American leverage since there are no *formal* expectations that countries will support specific donor policies. The MCC uses Freedom House and other nongovernmental sources to assess the

Table 1. Country Clusters. Average aid is calculated from years available, which is no less than three years except for Zimbabwe, where no data are available after 2005.

	Country	Aid as % of GNI, average since 2004	GDP growth %, average since 2004	MCA status at end of 2008	Econ. aid average since 2004 (millions)	Mil. Aid average since 2004 (millions)	MCA aid average since 2004 (millions)
Low Dependence (9)	Algeria	0.28	3.66	–	3.48	0.93	–
	Botswana	0.64	5.23	–	80.58	1.1	–
	Cameroon	6.57	3.38	–	10.75	0.45	–
	Kenya	4.23	5.5	Signed threshold	348.03	4.77	13.7
	Libya	0.05	6.0	–	7.73	–	–
	Namibia	2.38	4.19	Signed, but not in force	60.38	–	3
	Nigeria	5.33	6.03	–	207.9	1.73	–
	South Africa	0.29	4.62	–	251.13	–	–
	Sudan	5.76	8.8	–	791.65	145.08	–
High Dependence (4)	Liberia	72.94	6.44	Eligible threshold	153.73	36.07	–
	Madagascar	18.43	5.57	Compact signed	84.05	0.73	110
	Uganda	15.77	7.14	Eligible threshold	299.88	1.53	10.4
	Zambia	15.35	5.8	Signed threshold	166.95	0.38	12.4
	Djibouti	11.48	3.84	–	12.15	5.33	–
Swing States (6)	Congo-Brazz	12.75	4.34	–	8.58	0.3	–
	Ghana	10.86	6	Compact signed	219.63	1.53	188.93
	Ivory Coast	1.04	1.55	–	52.25	–	–
	Tanzania	14.89	6.82	Compact signed	174.2	1.7	14.5
	Zimbabwe	7.91	-4.55	–	67.85	–	–

eligibility of countries on the basis of their commitment to good governance, economic freedom, and social investment in citizens. It publishes scores of seventeen specific criteria to place countries in different performance categories. According to MCC terminology, “eligible” countries qualify for assistance and can submit a proposal in the form of a five-year agreement; some countries are therefore eligible for MCC funds but have not applied for them. Countries with “signed compacts” have applied for and received MCC funds. “Threshold” countries are close to qualifying for a compact, and they can sign a “threshold agreement” for lesser, more targeted aid to improve their weakest scores. Some MCC experts have pointed to its power of persuasion in Africa, noting that it was designed to enhance America’s leverage and reputation (Owusu 2007). Moreover, the money is quite significant for smaller countries, and MCC grants rose from \$204 million in 2006 to \$1.8 billion in 2007, in inflation-adjusted dollars.

Did Africa’s Political Economy Drive Reactions to AFRICOM?

Support for the political-economy hypothesis should correspond with three results on the support scale: low-dependency countries should illustrate lower average levels of support for AFRICOM because they have more latitude to articulate their interests free of external leverage. Next, the countries with high levels of foreign aid should be most vulnerable to American influence and therefore likeliest to support AFRICOM. For them, criticism poses direct risks to their economy. Finally, in swing states, we would expect to see statements on AFRICOM tempered by political expediency. Public commentary should be hedged or perhaps urge patience.

Figure 3 displays the average level of support for AFRICOM, grouping the countries according to the category of aid dependency. The high-dependency countries illustrate a range of responses but are generally more supportive of AFRICOM, with an average score of 2.48 (standard deviation = 0.95). Zambia is an outlier, with six news reports ranging from outright support to clear opposition. The swing states are slightly less supportive, with an average score of 2.78 (standard deviation = 0.95). Most notably though, the low-dependency countries consistently demonstrate the highest levels of opposition to AFRICOM, with an average score of 3.3 (standard deviation = 0.55). These results offer support for the political-economy hypothesis. They do not indicate that economic prosperity *caused* negative reactions in low dependence countries (i.e., that prosperous low-dependence countries will oppose AFRICOM or any other American initiative), but the pattern illustrated across all three groups does offer evidence that external economic dependence serves as a source of leverage over African countries.

The results could mean simply that countries that receive aid are friendlier toward the United States, creating a potential endogeneity problem; however, all the countries in the sample received some kind of economic aid—and often military aid, too—from the United States during the period in question. This means the tests capture the extent to which the

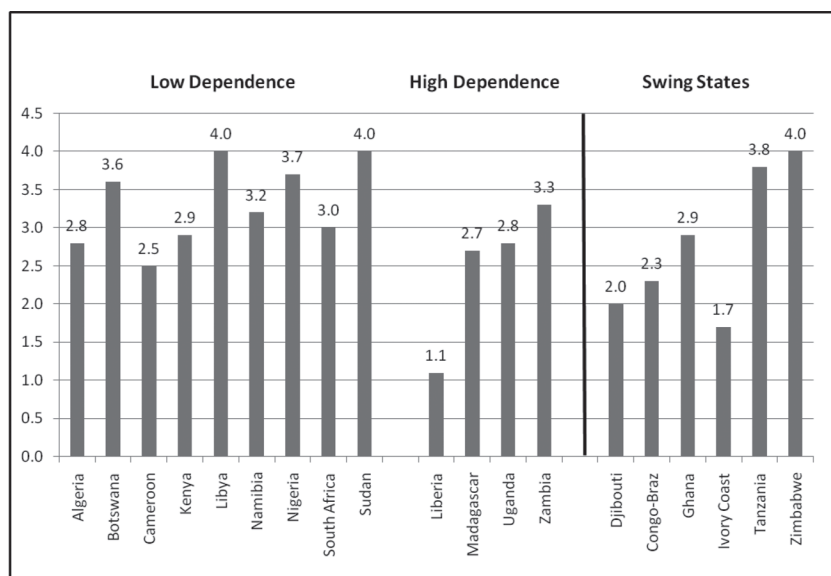


Figure 3. Average Level of Support by Country. Higher value = more opposition.

economy was insulated from the political ability of aid to persuade potential partners. Even more importantly, criticism of AFRICOM among countries in the low-dependence category includes many traditional U.S. allies, such as Kenya, South Africa, and Nigeria. Editorials in Nigeria, for example, declared “Stop Africom” and attributed President Bush’s decision not to visit Abuja to the country’s criticism of AFRICOM (*Leadership* 2007; *Vanguard* 2008). The countries in the high-dependency category point to another possible concern, since it is difficult to generalize from such a small group, yet this shortcoming seems less problematic when interpreted in tandem with the consistent results across the nine low-dependence countries.

Conclusion

As the World Bank, the ambitious effort by the African Economic Research Consortium, and a new generation of scholars engage in sweeping debates over the causes of Africa’s economic performance, this paper gives us good reason to think about its effects. The pattern between aid-dependency levels and initial responses to AFRICOM suggests that African politics remain embedded within broader economic relationships. This paper used content analysis to identify different levels of support for AFRICOM and demonstrated how aid dependence generally and assistance from new sources of American aid specifically, such as MCC, explains a great deal of variation. This variation in African responses by itself is noteworthy since American

civil-society groups have been tempted to characterize African responses to AFRICOM as uniformly negative, aside from Liberia (Foreign Policy in Focus 2009). At the same time, the findings here support the claims of scholars who challenge the public-relations explanation for negative reactions to AFRICOM. DOD attempted to manage public perceptions by arguing that AFRICOM constituted more continuity than change in security policy, and by downplaying AFRICOM's more controversial roles, even as DOD's share of foreign aid grew to massive levels. This resulted in conflicting official messages. The controversies on these and other issues have not gone away: six months after DOD announced that it would not headquarter AFRICOM on the continent, it informed Congress that it was working to "identify possible overseas locations as the permanent headquarters in Africa," and it would revisit the issue in 2011 (General Accountability Office 2009).

Future research could compare state-owned and independent media outlets to see if their editorial positions differed, or test for bias in the type of responses they reported. It could test to see where unofficial and official positions differed, since the latter constitute one third of all coded responses. For example, when the Cameroonian government warmly received top U.S. Army officials, the U.S. ambassador had to cancel her itinerary because of protests (*Cameroon Tribune* 2007; *The Post* 2008). In Liberia, the police banned public demonstrations in advance of President Bush's arrival in Monrovia. When President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf offered to host an American military headquarters, students erupted in protest (*Inter Press Service* 2008; *Star Radio* 2008). Much like popular struggles against neoliberal reforms in the 1980s, executive decisions that marginalize input from the legislative branch and civil society could undermine confidence in democratic institutions. There is already evidence that countries participating in the "War on Terrorism" can concentrate authority in the executive branch (Owens and Pelizzo 2009) or use counterterrorism authority to silence regime opponents (Whitaker 2007). Across Africa, strong executives are a problem that democracy assistance has spent much of the last two decades trying to address.

Future research could incorporate changes in U.S. policy over time. Some countries, such as Nigeria, softened their position on AFRICOM after the decision in 2008 not to build its headquarters in Africa. Similarly, a study of evolving African attitudes following the Pentagon's formal activation of AFRICOM in October 2008 could provide information about the impact of increased government-to-government consultations and the efficacy of American public-relations strategies, or analyze how incidents such as the 2010 bombings in Uganda have affected attitudes toward U.S. security policy.

This study comes at a time when foreign aid's impact on economic development (Collier 2007; Moyo 2010), democratization (Finkel et al. 2007), and dictatorship (Jourde 2007) is undergoing careful reexamination. This study points us in a different direction, toward the effectiveness of aid as an instrument of political leverage. This should come as good news to Barack

Obama's administration, whose budget request for fiscal year 2010 contained "a continued emphasis on leveraging soft power." The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review Report (2010) similarly emphasizes the integration of development and "economic tools of statecraft" with conventional defense to promote stability and prevent conflict. On the African side, the results here suggest that the best way to articulate national interests free of suzerainty is to sustain a robust domestic economy.

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NOTES

1. Presentation at National Defense University, 19 February 2008.
2. Letter from U.S. representatives Donald Payne and William Delahunt to Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, 16 September 2008.
3. American Political Science Association, *Task Force Report: U.S. Standing in the World: Causes, Consequences, and the Future*. (2009, retrieved 1 May 2010 from www.apsanet.org). See the Pew survey, *Global Opinion Trends, 2002–2007*. (retrieved 1 May 2010 from www.pewglobal.org).
4. As Ndulu, O'Connell, Bates, et al. demonstrate, much of this recent growth is not simply attributable to high prices of natural resources (Ndulu et al. 2008). Even if it is, the immediate consequences would be the same, with these more self-sufficient countries obtaining a measure of political leverage over donors.
5. For a critique of these recent indicators, see Pierre Englebert, *Africa: Unity, Sovereignty, and Sorrow* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 2009), 232–234.
6. This would present a bias if we were measuring the *frequency* of keywords appearing.
7. These countries are Angola, Benin, Comoros, Egypt, Ethiopia, Mozambique, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Somalia.
8. The swing and dependent states carry more debt, with thirteen of sixteen of the total possible cases either being close to or achieving Highly Indebted Poor Country (HIPC) debt relief.

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